

RUSSIA AND THE WEST IN IRAN

does not seem, however, to be quite fair. British moves were acts of sheer political realism. In their transactions with Iran they dealt with central or local authorities. If the central authority proved to be unreliable and weak, negotiations with local authorities were conducted. Since this authority was frequently centered in the tribes, it became necessary to deal with them. There is no evidence of any long-range British policy to weaken purposely the central Iranian government in order to increase the strength of the tribes. The support given to Sheikh Khazal may seem to prove the contrary. Yet one should remember that, apart from giving him refuge in Iraq, the British were not prepared to challenge Reza Shah's authority in Khuzistan once it was firmly established. One should bear in mind also that any obvious extension of British control over the southern provinces would be tantamount to inviting Russia to do the same thing in the north. And such an eventuality was distinctly unpleasant to British diplomacy. To be sure, twice in the twentieth century the British were obliged to compromise with their principles by dividing Iran into two spheres of influence. This happened in 1907 and in 1941, but in both cases this solution was imposed by the *force majeure* of German aggression. During World War II British policy seemed to be dedicated definitely to the strengthening of the central government of Iran as a counterweight against Soviet infiltration. If they cultivated friendship with the tribes at the same time, they were seeking reserves to rely upon in case of the government's collapse. The events of 1946, which will be described in the last chapter, seem to support this thesis.

Apart from the consular-political center of Bushire, the British operated through a network of consulates and agents in the whole of the Iranian south. An assistant military attache of the British Embassy, Colonel H. J. Underwood, was in special charge of tribal affairs and normally resided in KJiorramshahr. Major T. Jackson and a number of political officers operated in the Qashqai and other tribal areas and kept a watchful eye on any foreigners that happened to travel there. In Luristan similar duties were discharged by Colonel Noel, famous for his encounters with Wassmuss during the first World War and with the Jangalis in Gilan in 1920. The appointment of Alan Charles Trott, a diplomat of long experience in Iran, to the